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V. — *Catullus and the Ciris*

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ONE of the most characteristic creations of the Alexandrian age was the epyllion. The passion for detail and the skill in its use had affected all forms of literary expression and had, to a certain extent, compensated for the loss of the larger style of an earlier day. The impulse for story-telling was not dead, but there was no longer time to listen to stories in twenty-four books, and, to tell the truth, there was nobody left who could produce them. So they created the epic in miniature. It was to have all the epic qualities except size, and it undoubtedly served the need of the generation better than artificial adherence to the old form could have done. What heights it reached at its best we cannot say, but we have two interesting specimens of its use by Latin poets whose natural medium it was not. These are the poem of Catullus, ostensibly on the marriage of Peleus and Thetis but largely devoted to the story of Theseus and Ariadne, and the *Ciris*, the poem of the Vergilian Appendix which tells how Scylla, the daughter of Nisus, betrayed her father and her father's kingdom to Minos and was changed into a bird.

The authorship of the latter poem is not yet demonstrated beyond a reasonable doubt, but, for the present, let us assume that it was actually a work of Vergil's youth from which he later borrowed the lines and phrases which reappear in his maturer works. A study of the two epyllia makes it quite clear that, whoever the author was, he knew his Catullus well and was indebted particularly to the poem on the marriage of Peleus and Thetis. There is a general similarity between the subject of the *Ciris* and that of Theseus and Ariadne, which takes up about half of Catullus' poem. The central theme of each is the fate of a princess, who, enamored of a young foreigner, assists him against her father's interests

and is ungratefully cast off by him. It is worth noting that Minos, the villain of one piece, is the distressed maiden's father in the other. There are minor parallels, too, which are interesting if unimportant: the triumphant and faithless warrior sails home in each case; in each case prominence is given to the maiden's lament of despair; and in each case the catastrophe is laid to the cruelty of the god of love. But there is obviously no attempt to make the one an echo of the other, and, as neither of them can lay claim to much originality of subject-matter, these similarities would have little weight were there not other connections between them. But, when we come to consider the actual language of the poem, the case is very different. The parallels in the *Ciris* with Catullus in general and the *Marriage of Peleus and Thetis* in particular cannot possibly be mere coincidence. They range all the way from unmistakable likenesses of situation and phrase to petty similarities of small individual significance. Many, of course, have been previously noted by the editors, especially Vollmer, to whose revision of the *Poetae Latini Minores* I am indebted for some of them. However, as others have not come to the editors' attention, and as they are nowhere conveniently collected, I reproduce them that the reader may judge of their importance. In each case the passage from the *Ciris* is given first (cited by the line) and the parallel from Catullus directly underneath (cited by poem and line). The text of Vollmer (*P.L.M.* 1², 1910) has been followed for the *Ciris*, that of Ellis (1906) for Catullus.

Etsi me vario iactatum laudis amore (1)

Etsi me assiduo confectum cura dolore (65, 1)

Cecropius suavis expirans hortulus auras (3)

Florentis viridi sophiae complectitur umbra

Regia, quam suavis expirans castus odores (64, 87)

Lectulus in molli complexu matris alebat

Et leviter blandum liceat deponere morem (11)

Difficile est longum subito deponere amorem (76, 13)

Cum levis alterno zephyrus concrebuit euro (25)

Et prono gravidum provexit pondere currum

Ipsa levi fecit volitantem flamine currum (64, 9)

Haec tamen interea, quae possumus, in quibus aevi (44)

Prima rudimenta et iuvenes exegimus annos,

Accipe dona meo multum vigilata labore

Nunc tamen interea haec prisco quae more parentum (101, 7)

Tradita sunt tristi munere ad inferias

Accipe fraterno multum manantia fletu

Nam verum fateamur: amat Polyhymnia verum (55)

Iure igitur vincemur, amat victoria curam (62, 16)

Ipsae pater timidam saeva complexus harena (72)

Tum Thetidi pater ipse iugandum Pelea sensit (64, 21)

Heu quotiens mirata novos expalluit artus (81)

Quanto saepe magis fulgore expalluit auri (64, 100)

Quarum non ulli fama concedere digna (104)

Aut nihil aut paulo cui tum concedere digna (68, 131)

Sed neque tunc cives neque tunc rex ipse veretur (116)

Sed neque tum mitrae neque tum fluitantis amictus (64, 68)

Et roseus medio surgebat vertice crinis (122)

At roseo niveae residebant vertice vittae (64, 309)

Concordes stabili firmarant numine Parcae (125)

Annuit invicto caelestum numine rector (64, 204)

Aurea iam gracili solvisset corpore pallam (151)

Omnia quae retinere gradum cursusque morari

Auratam optantes Colchis avertere pellem (64, 5)

Omnia quae toto delapsa e corpore passim (64, 66)

Etsi quis nocuisse tibi periuria credat (156)

Tum iam nulla viro iuranti femina credat (64, 143)

Quae simul ac venis hausit sitientibus ignem (163)

Et validum penitus concepit in ossa furorem

Non prius ex illo flagrantia declinavit (64, 91)

Lumina, quam cuncto concepit corpore **flammas**

Funditus atque imis exarsit tota medullis

Infelix virgo tota bacchatur in urbe, (167)

Non styrace Idaeo fragrantis picta capillos

Coccina non teneris pedibus Sicyonia servans

Non niveo retinens bacata monilia collo

Saxea ut effigies bacchantis, prospicit, eheu (64, 61)

Prospicit et magnis curarum fluctuat undis

Non flavo retinens subtilem vertice mitram

Ut patris, a demens, crinem de vertice serum (185)

Cum incurvo canos solvent a vertice crines (64, 350)

Namque haec condicio miserae proponitur una (187)

Quam quoniam poenam misero proponis amor (99, 15)

Iamque adeo dulci devinctus lumina somno (206)

Aut ut eam * * devincta lumina somno¹ (64, 122)

Non accepta piis promittens munera divis (219)

Non ingrata tamen frustra munuscula divis (64, 103)
Promittens

Quod si alio quovis animi iactaris amore (241)

Quare agite optatos animi coniungite amores (64, 372)

Nam te iactari, non est amathusia nostri (242)

Multa satis lusi: non est dea nescia nostri (68, 17)

Nec tamen ante ullas patitur sibi reddere voces (255)

Nec missas audire queunt nec reddere voces (64, 166)

Intonsos multo deturpat pulvere crinis (284)

Canitiem terra atque infuso pulvere foedans (64, 224)

Praeceptis aerii specula de montis abissis (302)

Qualis in aerei perlucens vertice montis (68, 57)

Rivus muscoso prosilit e lapide

Qui cum de prona praeceptis est valle volutus

¹ If we may rely on the analogy the line would be

Aut ut eam dulci devinctam lumina somno.

Numquam ego te summo volitantem vertice . . . (307)

Numquam ego te, vita frater amabilior (65, 10)

Tene etiam Fortuna mihi crudelis ademit (313)

Quandoquidem fortuna mihi tete abstulit ipsum (101, 5)

Ut, cum caesa pio cecidisset victima ferro (366)

Quae, velut ancipiti succumbens victima ferro (64, 369)

Tum coma Sidonio florens deciditur ostro (387)

Tum capitur Megara et divom responsa probantur

Tum suspensa novo ritu de navibus altis

Tum Thetidis Peleus incensus fertur amore (64, 19)

Tum Thetis humanos non despexit hymenaeos

Tum Thetidi pater ipse iugandum Pelea sensit

Complures illam nymphae mirantur in undis (391)

Aequoreae monstrum Nereides admirantes (64, 15)

Tyndaridae niveos mirantur virginis artus (399)

Excipiet niveos percussae virginis artus (64, 364)

Dum queror et divos (quamquam nil testibus illis (405)

Profeci) extrema moriens tamen alloquor hora

Caelestumque fidem postrema comprecor hora (64, 191)

Certatim ex omni petiit quam Graecia regno (412)

Cum Delphi tota certatim ex urbe ruentes (64, 392)

. . . . e terris amplectitur Hellespontus (413)

Oceanusque, mari totum qui amplectitur orbem (64, 30)

Illa ego sum, Minos, sacrato foedere coniunx (414)

Accipiat coniunx felici foedere divam (64, 373)

Me non florentes aequali corpore nymphae (435)

Mortales oculi nudato corpore nymphas (64, 17)

Pronuba nec castos accendet pinus honores (439)

Nec Libys Assyrio sternetur lectulus ostro

Regia, quam suavis expirans castus odores (64, 87)

Lectulus in molli complexu matris alebat

Magna queror: ne me illa quidem communis alumnam (441)

Omnibus iniecta tellus tumulabit harena

Praeda, neque iniecta tumulabor mortua terra (64, 153)

Mene inter matres ancillarisque maritas (443)

Mene alias inter famularum munere fungi

Coniugis atque tuae, quaecunque erit illa, beatae

Non licuit gravidos penso devolvere fusos?

At tamen in vestras potuisti ducere sedes (64, 160)

Quae tibi iucundo famularer serva labore

Candida permulcens liquidis vestigia lymphis

Purpleave tuum consternens veste cubile.

Iam fesso tandem fugiunt de corpore vires (448)

Nec prius a fesso secedent corpore sensus (64, 189)

Aequoreae pristis, immania corpora ponti (451)

Aequoreae monstrum Nereides admirantes (64, 15)

Non tulit ac miseros mutavit virginis artus (482)

Excipiet niveos percussae virginis artus (64, 364)

Purpureas flavo retinentem vertice vittas (511)

Non flavo retinens subtilem vertice mitram (64, 63)

Non thalamus Syrio fragrans accepit amomo (512)

Fragrantem² Assyrio venit odore domum (68, 144)

Quae simul ut sese cano de gurgite velox (514)

Nutricum tenuis exstantes e gurgite cano (64, 18)

Illi pro pietate sua (nam saepe nitentum (524)

O di, reddite mi hoc pro pietate mea³ (76, 26)

This means that there is a reminiscence of Catullus on an average of one to every eleven lines of the *Ciris*, which is certainly too frequent to be an accident. Further than this, thirty-five of the forty-six passages cited above are from the *Marriage of Peleus and Thetis*. Indeed, the most significant thing about these parallels, next to their frequency, is the poems of Catullus which they represent. We are familiar with the influence of Catullus on Martial, to whom he was the prince of epigrammatists, but here we have a poet who has no connection with the epigrams, but who read Catullus for what we are accustomed to think of as his great poems.

As against this similarity it must be borne in mind that the *Ciris* is no parody of Catullus. Its vocabulary is not Catullan, nor is its meter. It is full of words which Catullus nowhere uses, it is less spondaic than his hexameters, and its rhythms are distinctly different. Nor is it like Catullus in literary treatment. It has its unevennesses and crudities: the hand of the novice may be known in that scene where the unhappy

² fragrantem *D*; fraglantem *Ellis*; fragrantem *codd. plerique*.

³ Vollmer cites also *Cir.* 104: Cat. 68, 131; and *Cir.* 195: Cat. 64, 23, where, however, the connection is so very doubtful that it does not seem worth while to reproduce the lines.

Scylla, thrown overboard from Minos' homeward-bound ship, is dragged from Megara to Seriphus before she expires. It seems a little odd, too, that the poet should take so long at the beginning to tell what he is not going to write about and should then dismiss the capture of the town in one line. But does not Catullus spend two hundred lines on a coverlet while he disposes of the Argo in the first twenty and summarizes the history of the world since the heroic age in the last ten? In a fair comparison of the poems as to their narrative quality alone, Catullus comes out second best. The episode of the nurse in the *Ciris*, for example, gives evidence of a true epic genius, undeveloped as yet, but showing promise of great things.

And now, to return for a moment to the question of authorship. Who but Vergil, the master-borrower, could use another poet so extensively without pawning his individuality? And who so likely as Vergil to borrow from Catullus? At least, we may dismiss the possibility of this being the work of an unknown plagiarist. Why should anyone quote direct from Vergil and only adapt Catullus? To choose theme and matter from the one, matter and style from the other, is surely over-complicated for a forger to undertake. And the poem does not read like the work of a hack writer. No one contends that it is great poetry, but it is precisely the kind of poetry that belongs in the juvenalia of many a great poet. Here is Vergil's dramatic power in embryo — the first foreshadowing of his pathos and his mastery of character-drawing. Scylla and her nurse are the sketches from which, in the fulness of time, Dido and Anna are to be painted. Perhaps even the colorless Minos is the forerunner of Aeneas sailing away from Carthage. It is surely possible to suppose that Vergil, his laurels still before him but conscious of the power within, having promised a poem to Messala, should have hit upon the fashionable epyllion to experiment with and should be attracted to it because of its use by the great Latin poet. Vergil chose his models wisely. Theocritus, Lucre-

tius, and Homer were guides of his maturity. To these names Catullus is a worthy addition. It is true that the epyllion is not his best poem. He needed a shorter and more intense medium as Vergil needed a larger. On this middle ground neither was quite at home. Yet the elder poet had given the younger a model he could follow with enthusiasm and admiration. It is not really an epic at all; it is a collection of pictures, but pictures of a vigor and freshness utterly beyond the powers of the careful and sophisticated Greeks of that time. As a translation from pictorial to poetic art *Ariadne on the shore* is a masterpiece; Homer himself might have been proud of the simile of the guests scattering like sunlit waves at morning. What Catullus in the steadier genius of middle age would have produced we cannot even guess, but it may be that in our debt to him must be included the first attraction to heroic song which culminated in the song of arms and a hero.